# Ibn Rushd (Averroes), 1126–1198

Ibn Rushd marked the climax of Muslim Aristotelianism and, at the same time, its virtual end. Historic circumstances deprived him of followers among his own people, but through translations of his works into Latin and Hebrew he found attentive students as well as faithful disciples among Christians and Jews. His incisive commentaries on most of Aristotle's works earned him the title "The Commentator," and his particular kind of Aristotelianism became a well-defined strand in the fabric of later medieval thought.

First and foremost Ibn Rushd was a commentator on Aristotle's works. As such he considered it his primary task to cleanse Aristotle's teachings of the impurities that had resulted from the erroneous interpretation of earlier commentators. His polemic was directed in particular against Ibn Sīnā who, so he thought, had capitulated to theological interests on certain crucial points. Then again, there appeared to be lacunae in Aristotle's works. Ibn Rushd had no doubts that the missing portions had been discussed by Aristotle in works no longer extant, but in his own days what was missing had to be supplied by judicious interpretation. Still further, the dialectical theologians had dealt with philosophical issues in faulty ways and their mistakes had to be corrected. And finally, al-Ghazālī (see page 265) had launched a grand attack on Aristotelianism as a whole, and this attack had to be repulsed.

Ibn Rushd's position is perhaps best characterized by his critique of a certain Avicennian point. Analyzing substances existing within the world, Ibn Sīnā had distinguished between their essence and existence, affirming at the same time that essence is ontologically prior to existence and that existence is something added to essence (see page 239). Rejecting this Avicennian distinction, Ibn Rushd held that individual substances exist primarily and, though the mind can distinguish between essence and existence in them, ontologically speaking, the two are one. Thus, while for Ibn Sīnā essences were primary, for Ibn Rushd primacy belonged to individual substances.

In his physical teachings Ibn Rushd accepted the Aristotelian picture of the universe with its distinction between a sublunar and translunar world. The sublunar world is subject to generation and corruption, and substances within it are ultimately reducible to the four elements. The four elements, in turn, are composed of first matter and a substantial or elemental form. The translunar world, on the other hand, is eternal, and it consists of celestial spheres, each of which is composed of a celestial body and an immaterial mover. Yet upon this general scheme Ibn Rushd imposed modifications of his own. An example is provided by his doctrine of the corporeal form. To bridge the gap between Aristotle's prime matter (which is a rather enigmatic notion) and the elemental form, interpreters had posited a corporeal form. This form was common to all bodies and, according to some, it was related in some way to the property of dimensionality. Ibn Sīnā had defined the corporeal form as a form having a predisposition for receiving the three dimensions, insisting, however, that this form must differ from three-dimensionality, since form must be in the category of substance, while dimensionality must be in the category of quantity. Ibn Rushd accepted the alternative rejected by Ibn Sīnā, defining the corporeal form as being identical with indeterminate three-dimensionality. Similarly, Ibn Rushd differed from

Ibn Sīnā in his description of the celestial movers. Invoking an analogy between man and the celestial spheres, both philosophers agreed that the celestial movers consist of soul and intellect. But whereas for Ibn Sīnā the celestial soul inhered within the celestial body while the celestial intelligence existed in separation from it, for Ibn Rushd soul and intelligence were but two aspects of the same immaterial celestial mover.

As in physics so in metaphysics, Ibn Rushd offered interpretations of his own. Ibn Sīnā had maintained that metaphysics not only investigates whatever can be known about God but also demonstrates that He exists. In support of this position he had formulated his famous proof of the existence of God, known as the proof from necessity and contingency (see page 240). Taking issue with Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd maintained that physics establishes the existence of the subject matter of metaphysics and that, moreover, Ibn Sīnā's proof is invalid. Ibn Sīnā's proof, he argued, requires that there exist beings possible through themselves and necessary through another; and it can be shown that such beings do not exist. Hence, for Ibn Rushd, only physical proofs, that is those which establish the existence of a prime mover, are valid for demonstrating that God exists.

In describing God and His relation to the world Ibn Rushd turned from the neoplatonic One to Aristotle's divine thought thinking itself. In thinking himself, God also thinks things and events within the world, and this is what is meant by 'providence.' There is evidence that, according to Ibn Rushd, God thinks the things within the world as particulars. But God's knowledge, as he points out, is completely different from that of man. Ibn Rushd similarly turns from neoplatonic teachings in his account of creation. For Neoplatonists and their Muslim followers the major issue was to explain how a multiple world could come to be from an ultimate principle that was unique and simple. The world, they held, came into being through successive emanations such that each principle emanated from one above it in the scale of being. The problem of the one principle and its many effects held little interest for Ibn Rushd and hence he rejected the doctrine of emanation. Creation, for him, meant the causal structure of the world, not its emanation from a first principle. If things within the world are said to come from a first principle at all, they all must come from that principle without the aid of intermediary beings. To illustrate this point Ibn Rushd compares the world to an army that is directed by a leader. With the rejection of emanation, Ibn Rushd also denied Ibn Sīnā's Giver of Forms, which is the Agent Intellect insofar as it provides forms for sublunar beings. Creation does not take place in time.

His doctrine of the intellect became one of those teachings for which Ibn Rushd was best known. Like earlier Muslims, he tried to give precision to the various intellects of which Aristotle had spoken in the *De anima* or that the commentators had found implied in Aristotle's words. Ibn Rushd agreed with other Muslims in identifying the Agent Intellect, required as an efficient cause for thinking, with the lowest of the intelligences, namely, that which governs the sublunar sphere (see page 220). But in describing the material intellect he formulated a doctrine of his own. Reviewing earlier opinions, he rejected that of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who had identified this intellect with a bodily predisposition, as well as that of Themistius and others, who had identified it with an individual spiritual substance. Ibn Rushd held that the material intellect, like any intellectual principle, must be immaterial and universal, that is, it must be common to all men. This is Ibn Rushd's much-to-be-debated doctrine of the unity of the intellect. It follows from Ibn Rushd's description that when the material intellect becomes actualized, it remains one for all men and that immortality, therefore, is general, not particular. Knowledge becomes particular through phantasms that accompany it in the imagination of everyone who knows. Ibn Rushd identified Aristotle's "passive intellect" with the imagination.

In addition to commenting on Aristotle, Ibn Rushd also wrote on politics and religion, following in the footsteps of al-Fārābī and other Muslim Aristotelians. Here his orientation was Platonic. With other Muslim Aristotelians, he accepted Plato's notion of an ideal state to which he (as they) added that it comes into being through a prophet-legislator. The state is composed of different classes, and the prophetic law must

speak to all. Ibn Rushd undertook to give a more specific description of the classes within the state. Invoking Aristotelian logical principles, he divided the citizens into the rulers, who can follow demonstrations, the masses, who are persuaded by rhetorical arguments, and, between them, the dialectical theologians, who can understand dialectical discussions (see page 292). But whereas al-Fārābī advocated a refinement of popular religious beliefs, Ibn Rushd insisted that each of the three classes must be taught on its own level. General philosophical enlightenment, according to him, is proscribed. From this exposition it follows that truth appears in three forms—demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical—the last two being primarily the province of religion. Whether Ibn Rushd finally saw all three forms of truth or only the first as productive of ultimate human happiness has been debated by interpreters.

Abū Walīd Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd was born in 1126 in Cordova, son of a distinguished family of jurists. Though it is not known who his teachers were, it is evident from his works that he received thorough training in Islamic law as well as in the philosophical sciences. In 1153 he was in Marrakesh where he was in contact with the first Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min, perhaps in connection with a school that the ruler had founded at that time. Of the next period nothing is known but that he composed a book on medicine. In 1168 he was in Marrakesh once again, and at this time Ibn Ṭufayl, vizier and court physician, introduced him to Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, the son who had succeeded 'Abd al-Mu'min as ruler. According to one account, the ruler, at a meeting, asked Ibn Rushd what the Aristotelians think about the eternity of the world. Afraid, Ibn Rushd claimed to be not conversant with their teachings. But when the ruler, in conversation with Ibn Ṭufayl, showed that he was acquainted with philosophy and sympathetic to it, Ibn Rushd no longer hesitated to speak. Somewhat later Ibn Ṭufayl transmitted to Ibn Rushd the ruler's invitation to comment on Aristotle's works, which he had found rather obscure. In 1169, Ibn Rushd was appointed judge in Seville, and in that year his first commentary on Aristotle appeared. In 1171 he returned to Cordova, where he probably also filled the office of judge. In 1182, when Ibn Ṭufayl retired, he took his place as court physician to Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf. When in 1184 the ruler died and his son Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb took his place, Ibn Rushd retained his post. In 1195, for reasons which are not too clear, Ibn Rushd fell in disgrace and all his works except those of a purely scientific nature were burned. Having been exiled to Lucenna (near Cordova) for a short time, he was restored to grace. He lived in retirement in Marrakesh until his death in 1198.

The majority of Ibn Rushd's works were commentaries on Aristotle's writings. These commentaries appeared in three forms—epitomes, intermediate commentaries, and long commentaries. Altogether he wrote thirty-eight commentaries of the various kinds. Of these only twenty-eight are still extant in the original Arabic, thirty-six in Hebrew translations, and thirty-four in Latin translations dating from various times. Besides a number of opuscula dealing with a variety of philosophical issues, among them *De substantia orbis*, he wrote a refutation of al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of "The Incoherence" (Tahāfut al-Tahāfut)*. Al-Ghazālī (see p. 265) had written a work entitled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-Falāsifah)* in which he attacked the opinions of the Muslim Aristotelians, in particular those of Ibn Sīnā. Ibn Rushd's *Tahāfut* was his reply. In addition there must be mentioned his work on medicine *Kullīyāt* (*Colliget*), his *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic,'* and his treatises on religion, chief among them *The Decisive Treatise Determining the Nature of the Connection between Religion and Philosophy (Faṣl al-Maqāl)*.

It should be added that the Latin world knew Ibn Rushd primarily as interpreter of Aristotle, and his works on religion were either not known at all or were known very late. Small wonder then that Ibn Rushd, for the Latin world, was a naturalistic Aristotelian who advocated the doctrines of the eternity of the world, absence of individual providence, and collective immortality—all doctrines contradictory to principles of Christian faith. It can readily be seen why Christian philosophers saw in him the father of the theory of the double truth, according to which philosophy and religion can stand in contradiction, although, in fact, he never subscribed to this view.

The first selection is *The Decisive Treatise*. It should be noted that this work is written in the form of a legal responsum designed to show that Qur'ānic law requires the study of philosophy for those who are fit for it. It should be added that Abū Naṣr is al-Fārābī and Abū Ḥāmid is al-Ghazālī. For a description of the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites the reader is referred to the introduction to the Islamic section. The translator divided the work into chapters and the superscriptions are his. The remaining selections are taken from the *Long Commentary on "The Soul"* and from *The Incoherence of "The Incoherence."* They concern Ibn Rushd's theory of the intellect, contrasting the material intellect with the Active Intellect.

# 25. The Decisive Treatise

## What Is the Attitude of the Law to Philosophy?

Thus spoke the lawyer, *imām*, judge, and unique scholar, Abul Walīd Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd:

[1] Praise be to God with all due praise, and a prayer for Muḥammad His chosen servant and apostle. The purpose of this treatise is to examine, from the standpoint of the study of the Law, whether the study of philosophy and logic is allowed by the Law, or prohibited, or commanded—either by way of recommendation or as obligatory.

## 1. The Law Makes Philosophic Studies Obligatory

If teleological study of the world is philosophy, and if the Law commands such a study, then the Law commands philosophy.

[2] We say: If the activity of "philosophy" is nothing more than study of existing beings and reflection on them as indications of the Artisan, that is, inasmuch as they are products of art (for beings only indicate the Artisan through our knowledge of the art in them, and the more perfect this knowledge is, the more perfect the knowledge of the Artisan becomes), and if the Law has encouraged and urged reflection on beings, then it is clear that what this name signifies is either obligatory or recommended by the Law.

The Law commands such a study.

[3] That the Law summons to reflection on beings, and the pursuit of knowledge about them, by the intellect is clear from several verses of the Book of God, Blessed and Exalted, such as the saying of the Exalted, "Reflect, you {who} have vision" (Qur'ān, 59:2): this is textual authority for the obligation to use intellectual reasoning or a combination of intellectual and legal reasoning (7:185). Another example is His saying, "Have they not studied the kingdom of the heavens and the Earth, and whatever things God has created?": this is a text urging the study of the totality of beings. Again, God the Exalted has taught that one of those whom He singularly honored by his knowledge was Abraham, peace on him, for the Exalted said (6:75), "So we made Abraham see the kingdom of the heavens and the Earth, that he might be . . ." [and so on to the end of the verse]. The Exalted also said (88:17–18), "Do they not observe the camels, how they have been created, and the sky, how it has been raised up?" and He said (3:191), "and they give thought to the creation of the heavens and the Earth," and so on in countless other verses.

This study must be conducted in the best manner, by demonstrative reasoning.

[4] Since it has now been established that the Law has rendered obligatory the study of beings by the intellect and reflection on them, and since reflection is nothing more than inference and drawing out of the unknown from the known, and since this is reasoning or at any rate done by reasoning, therefore we are under an obligation to carry on our study of beings by intellectual reasoning. It is further evident that this manner of study, to which the Law summons and urges, is the most perfect kind of study using the most perfect kind of reasoning; and this is the kind called "demonstration."

To master this instrument the religious thinker must make a preliminary study of logic, just as the lawyer must study legal reasoning. This is no more heretical in the one case than in the other. And logic must be learned from the ancient masters, regardless of the fact that they were not Muslims.

[5] The Law, then, has urged us to have demonstrative knowledge of God the Exalted and all the beings of His creation. But it is preferable and even necessary for anyone who wants to understand God

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the Exalted and the other beings demonstratively to have first understood the kinds of demonstration and their conditions [of validity], and in what respects demonstrative reasoning differs from dialectical, rhetorical, and fallacious reasoning. But this is not possible unless he has previously learned what reasoning as such is, and how many kinds it has, and which of them are valid and which invalid. This in turn is not possible unless he has previously learned the parts of reasoning, of which it is composed, that is, the premises and their kinds. Therefore, he who believes in the Law, and obeys the command to study beings, ought prior to his study to gain a knowledge of these things, which have the same place in theoretical studies as instruments have in practical activities.

[6] For just as the lawyer infers from the Divine command to him to acquire knowledge of the legal categories that he is under obligation to know the various kinds of legal syllogisms, and which are valid and which invalid, in the same way he who would know [God] ought to infer from the command to study beings that he is under obligation to acquire a knowledge of intellectual reasoning and its kinds. Indeed it is more fitting for him to do so, for if the lawyer infers from the saying of the Exalted, "Reflect, you who have vision," the obligation to acquire a knowledge of legal reasoning, how much more fitting and proper that he who would know God should infer from it the obligation to acquire a knowledge of intellectual reasoning!

[7] It cannot be objected: "This kind of study of intellectual reasoning is a heretical innovation, since it did not exist among the first believers." For the study of legal reasoning and its kinds is also something that has been discovered since the first believers, yet it is not considered to be a heretical innovation. So the objector should believe the same about the study of intellectual reasoning. (For this there is a reason, which it is not the place to mention here.) But most [masters] of this religion support intellectual reasoning, except a small group of gross literalists who can be refuted by [sacred] texts.

[8] Since it has now been established that there is an obligation of the Law to study intellectual reasoning and its kinds, just as there is an obligation to study legal reasoning, it is clear that if none of our predecessors had formerly examined intellectual reasoning and its kinds, we should be obliged to undertake such an examination from the beginning, and that each succeeding scholar would have to seek help in that task from his predecessor in order that knowledge of the subject might be completed. For it is difficult or impossible for one man to find out by himself and from the beginning all that he needs of that subject, as it is difficult for one man to discover all the knowledge that he needs of the kinds of legal reasoning; indeed this is even truer of knowledge of intellectual reasoning.

[9] But if someone other than ourselves has already examined that subject, it is clear that we ought to seek help towards our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor on the subject, regardless of whether this other one shares our religion or not. For when a valid sacrifice is performed with a certain instrument, no account is taken, in judging the validity of the sacrifice, of whether the instrument belongs to one who shares our religion or to one who does not, so long as it fulfils the conditions for validity. By "those who do not share our religion," I refer to those ancients who studied these matters before Islam. So if such is the case, and everything that is required in the study of the subject of intellectual syllogisms has already been examined in the most perfect manner by the ancients, presumably we ought to lay hands on their books in order to study what they said about that subject; and if it is all correct we should accept it from them, while if there is anything incorrect in it, we should draw attention to that.

After logic we must proceed to philosophy proper. Here too we have to learn from our predecessors, just as in mathematics and law. Thus, it is wrong to forbid the study of ancient philosophy. Harm from it is accidental, like harm from taking medicine, drinking water, or studying law.

[10] When we have finished with this sort of study and acquired the instruments by whose aid we are able to reflect on beings and the indications of art in them (for he who does not understand the art does not understand the product of art, and he who does not understand the product of art does not understand the Artisan), then we ought to begin the examination of beings in the order and manner we have learned from the art of demonstrative syllogisms.

[11] And again it is clear that in the study of beings this aim can be fulfilled by us perfectly only through successive examinations of them by one man after another, the later ones seeking the help of the earlier in that task, on the model of what has happened in the mathematical sciences. For if we suppose that the art of geometry did not exist in this age of ours, and likewise the art of astronomy, and a single person wanted to ascertain by himself the sizes of the heavenly bodies, their shapes, and their distances from each other, that would not be possible for him—for example, to know the proportion of the Sun to the Earth or other facts about the sizes of the stars—even though he were the most intelligent of men by nature, unless by a revelation or something resembling revelation. Indeed, if he were told that the Sun is about 150 or 160 times as great as the Earth, he would think this statement madness on the part of the speaker, although this is a fact that has been demonstrated in astronomy so surely that no one who has mastered that science doubts it.

[12] But what calls even more strongly for comparison with the art of mathematics in this respect is the art of the principles of law; and the study of law itself was completed only over a long period of time. And if someone today wanted to find out by himself all the arguments that have been discovered by the theorists of the legal schools on controversial questions, about which debate has taken place between them in most countries of Islam (except the West), he would deserve to be ridiculed, because such a task is impossible for him, apart from the fact that the work has been done already. Moreover, this is a situation that is self-evident not in the scientific arts alone but also in the practical arts; for there is not one of them that a single man can construct by himself. Then how can he do it with the art of arts, philosophy? If this is so, then whenever we find in the works of our predecessors of former nations a theory about beings and a reflection on them conforming to what the conditions of demonstration require, we ought to study what they said about the matter and what they affirmed in their books. And we should accept from them gladly and gratefully whatever in these books accords with the truth, and draw attention to and warn against what does not accord with the truth, at the same time excusing them.

[13] From this it is evident that the study of the books of the ancients is obligatory by Law, since their aim and purpose in their books is just the purpose to which the Law has urged us, and that whoever forbids the study of them to anyone who is fit to study them, that is, anyone who unites two qualities, (1) natural intelligence, and (2) religious integrity and moral virtue, is blocking people from the door by which the Law summons them to knowledge of God, the door of theoretical study that leads to the truest knowledge of Him; and such an act is the extreme of ignorance and estrangement from God the Exalted.

[14] And if someone errs or stumbles in the study of these books owing to a deficiency in his natural capacity, or bad organization of his study of them, or being dominated by his passions, or not finding a teacher to guide him to an understanding of their contents, or a combination of all or more than one of these causes, it does not follow that one should forbid them to anyone who is qualified to study them. For this manner of harm that arises owing to them is something that is attached to them by accident, not by essence; and when a thing is beneficial by its nature and essence, it ought not to be shunned because of something harmful contained in it by accident. This was the thought of the Prophet, peace on him, on the occasion when he ordered a man to give his brother honey to drink for his diarrhea, and the diarrhea increased after he had given him the honey. When the man complained to him about it, he said, "God spoke the truth; it was your brother's stomach that lied." We can even say that a man who prevents a qualified person from studying books of philosophy, because some of the most vicious people may be thought to have gone astray through their study of them, is like a man who prevents a thirsty person from drinking cool, fresh water until he dies of thirst, because some people have choked to death on it. For death from water by choking is an accidental matter, but death by thirst is essential and necessary.

[15] Moreover, this accidental effect of this art is a thing that may also occur accidentally from the other arts. To how many lawyers has law been a cause of lack of piety and immersion in this world! Indeed we find most lawyers in this state, although their art by its essence calls for nothing but practical virtue. Thus, it is not strange if the same thing that occurs accidentally

in the art that calls for practical virtue should occur accidentally in the art that calls for intellectual virtue.

For every Muslim the Law has provided a way to truth suitable to his nature, through demonstrative, dialectical, or rhetorical methods.

[16] Since all this is now established, and since we, the Muslim community, hold that this divine religion of ours is true and that it is this religion that incites and summons us to the happiness that consists in the knowledge of God, Mighty and Majestic, and of His creation, that [end] is appointed for every Muslim by the method of assent that his temperament and nature require. For the natures of men are on different levels with respect to [their paths to] assent. One of them comes to assent through demonstration; another comes to assent through dialectical arguments just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstration, since his nature does not contain any greater capacity; while another comes to assent through rhetorical arguments, again just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstrative arguments.

[17] Thus, since this divine religion of ours has summoned people by these three methods, assent to it has extended to everyone except him who stubbornly denies it with his tongue or him for whom no method of summons to God the Exalted has been appointed in religion owing to his own neglect of such matters. It was for this purpose that the Prophet, peace on him, was sent with a special mission to "the white man and the black man" alike; I mean because his religion embraces all the methods of summons to God the Exalted. This is clearly expressed in the saying of God the Exalted (16:125), "Summon to the way of your Lord by wisdom and by good preaching, and debate with them in the most effective manner."

## 2. Philosophy Contains Nothing Opposed to Islam

Demonstrative truth and scriptural truth cannot conflict.

[18] Now since this religion is true and summons to the study which leads to knowledge of the Truth, we the Muslim community know definitely that demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what Scripture has given us; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it.

If the apparent meaning of Scripture conflicts with demonstrative conclusions, it must be interpreted allegorically, that is, metaphorically.

[19] This being so, whenever demonstrative study leads to any manner of knowledge about any being, that being is inevitably either unmentioned or mentioned in Scripture. If it is unmentioned there is no contradiction, and it is in the same case as an act whose category is unmentioned, so that the lawyer has to infer it by reasoning from Scripture. If Scripture speaks about it, the apparent meaning of the words inevitably either accords or conflicts with the conclusions of demonstration about it. If this [apparent meaning] accords, there is no argument. If it conflicts, there is a call for allegorical interpretation of it. The meaning of "allegorical interpretation" is: extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance, without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic, such as calling a thing by the name of something resembling it or a cause or consequence or accompaniment of it, or other things such as are enumerated in accounts of the kinds of metaphorical speech.

If the lawyer can do this, the religious thinker certainly can. Indeed these allegorical interpretations always receive confirmation from the apparent meaning of other passages of Scripture.

[20] Now if the lawyer does this in many decisions of religious law, with how much more right is it done by the possessor of demonstrative knowledge! For the lawyer has at his disposition only reasoning based on opinion, while he who would know [God] [has at his disposition] reasoning based on certainty. So we affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scripture, that apparent meaning admits of allegorical interpretation according to the rules for such interpretation in Arabic. This proposition is questioned by no Muslim and doubted by no believer. But its certainty is immensely increased for those who have had close dealings with this idea and put it to the test, and made it their aim to reconcile the assertions of intel-

lect and tradition. Indeed, we may say that whenever a statement in Scripture conflicts in its apparent meaning with a conclusion of demonstration, if Scripture is considered carefully and the rest of its contents searched page by page, there will invariably be found among the expressions of Scripture something that in its apparent meaning bears witness to that allegorical interpretation or comes close to bearing witness.

All Muslims accept the principle of allegorical interpretation; they only disagree about the extent of its application.

[21] In the light of this idea, the Muslims are unanimous in holding that it is not obligatory either to take all the expressions of Scripture in their apparent meaning or to extend them all from their apparent meaning by allegorical interpretation. They disagree [only] over which of them should and which should not be so interpreted: the Ash'arites for instance give an allegorical interpretation to the verse about God's directing Himself and the Tradition about His descent, while the Hanbalites take them in their apparent meaning.

The double meaning has been given to suit people's diverse intelligence. The apparent contradictions are meant to stimulate the learned to deeper study.

[22] The reason why we have received a Scripture with both an apparent and an inner meaning lies in the diversity of people's natural capacities and the difference of their innate dispositions with regard to assent. The reason why we have received in Scripture texts whose apparent meanings contradict each other is in order to draw the attention of those who are well grounded in science to the interpretation that reconciles them. This is the idea referred to in the words received from the Exalted (3:7), "He it is who has sent down to you the Book, containing certain verses clear and definite" [and so on], down to the words, "those who are well grounded in science."

In interpreting texts allegorically, we must never violate Islamic consensus when it is certain. But to establish it with certainty with regard to theoretical texts is impossible, because there have always been scholars who would not divulge their interpretation of such texts.

[23] It may be objected: "There are some things in Scripture that the Muslims have unanimously agreed to take in their apparent meaning, others [that they have agreed] to interpret allegorically, and others about which they have disagreed; is it permissible, then, that demonstration should lead to interpreting allegorically what they have agreed to take in its apparent meaning, or to taking in its apparent meaning what they have agreed to interpret allegorically?" We reply: If unanimous agreement is established by a method that is certain, such [a result] is not sound; but if [the existence of] agreement on those things is a matter of opinion, then it may be sound. This is why Abū Hāmid, Abul-Ma'ālī, and other leaders of thought said that no one should be definitely called an unbeliever for violating unanimity on a point of interpretation in matters like these.

[24] That unanimity on theoretical matters is never determined with certainty, as it can be on practical matters, may be shown to you by the fact that it is not possible for unanimity to be determined on any question at any period unless that period is strictly limited by us, and all the scholars existing in that period are known to us (that is, known as individuals and in their total number), and the doctrine of each of them on the question has been handed down to us on unassailable authority, and, in addition to all this, unless we are sure that the scholars existing at the time were in agreement that there is not both an apparent and an inner meaning in Scripture, that knowledge of any question ought not to be kept secret from anyone, and that there is only one way for people to understand Scripture. But it is recorded in Tradition that many of the first believers used to hold that Scripture has both an apparent and an inner meaning, and that the inner meaning ought not to be learned by anyone who is not a man of learning in this field and who is incapable of understanding it. Thus, for example, Bukhārī reports a saying of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, "Speak to people about what they know. Do you want God and His Prophet to be accused of lying?" Other examples of the same kind are reported about a group of early believers. So how can it possibly be conceived that a unanimous agreement can have been handed down to us about a single theoretical question, when we know definitely that not a single period has been without scholars who held that

there are things in Scripture whose true meaning should not be learned by all people?

[25] The situation is different in practical matters: everyone holds that the truth about these should be disclosed to all people alike, and to establish the occurrence of unanimity about them we consider it sufficient that the question [at issue] should have been widely discussed and that no report of controversy about it should have been handed down to us. This is enough to establish the occurrence of unanimity on matters of practice, but on matters of doctrine the case is different.

Al-Ghazālī's charge of unbelief against al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, for asserting the world's eternity and God's ignorance of particulars and denying bodily resurrection, is only tentative not definite.

[26] You may object: "If we ought not to call a man an unbeliever for violating unanimity in cases of allegorical interpretation, because no unanimity is conceivable in such cases, what do you say about the Muslim philosophers, like Abū Naṣr and Ibn Sīnā? For Abū Ḥāmid {al-Ghāzālī} called them both definitely unbelievers in the book of his known as *The Disintegration* [*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*], on three counts: their assertions of the pre-eternity of the world, and that God the Exalted does not know particulars" (may He be Exalted far above that [ignorance]!), "and their allegorical interpretation of the passages concerning the resurrection of bodies and states of existence in the next life."

[27] We answer: it is apparent from what he said on the subject that his calling them both unbelievers on these counts was not definite, since he made it clear in *The Book of Distinction* that calling people unbelievers for violating unanimity can only be tentative.

Such a charge cannot be definite, because there has never been a consensus against allegorical interpretation. The Qur'ān itself indicates that it has inner meanings that it is the special function of the demonstrative class to understand.

[28] Moreover, it is evident from what we have said that a unanimous agreement cannot be established in questions of this kind, because of the reports that many of the early believers of the first generation, as well as others, have said that there are allegorical interpretations that ought not to be expressed except to those who are qualified to receive allegories. These are "those who are well grounded in science"; for we prefer to place the stop after the words of God the Exalted (3:7) "and those who are well grounded in science," because if the scholars did not understand allegorical interpretation, there would be no superiority in their assent that would oblige them to a belief in Him not found among the unlearned. God has described them as those who believe in Him, and this can only be taken to refer to the belief that is based on demonstration; and this [belief] only occurs together with the science of allegorical interpretation. For the unlearned believers are those whose belief in Him is not based on demonstration; and if this belief that God has attributed to the scholars is peculiar to them, it must come through demonstration, and if it comes through demonstration it only occurs together with the science of allegorical interpretation. For God the Exalted has informed us that those [verses] have an allegorical interpretation that is the truth, and demonstration can only be of the truth. That being the case, it is not possible for general unanimity to be established about allegorical interpretations, which God has made peculiar to scholars. This is self-evident to any fair-minded person.

Besides, al-Ghazālī was mistaken in ascribing to the Peripatetics the opinion that God does not know particulars. Their view is that His knowledge of both particulars and universals differs from ours in being the cause, not an effect, of the object known. They even hold that God sends premonitions in dreams of particular events.

[29] In addition to all this we hold that Abū Ḥāmid was mistaken about the Peripatetic philosophers in ascribing to them the assertion that God, Holy and Exalted, does not know particulars at all. In reality they hold that God the Exalted knows them in a way that is not of the same kind as our way of knowing them. For our knowledge of them is an effect of the object known, originated when it comes into existence and changing when it changes; whereas Glorious God's Knowledge of existence is the opposite of this: it is the cause of the object known, which is existent being. Thus to suppose the two kinds of knowledge similar to each other is to identify the essences and properties of opposite things, and that is the extreme of ignorance.

And if the name of "knowledge" is predicated of both originated and eternal knowledge, it is predicated by sheer homonymy, as many names are predicated of opposite things: for example, *jalal* of great and small, *sarīm* of light and darkness. Thus there exists no definition embracing both kinds of knowledge at once, as the theologians of our time imagine. We have devoted a separate essay to this question, impelled by one of our friends.[1]

[30] But how can anyone imagine that the Peripatetics say that God the Glorious does not know particulars with His eternal Knowledge, when they hold that true visions include premonitions of particular events due to occur in future time, and that this warning foreknowledge comes to people in their sleep from the eternal Knowledge that orders and rules the universe? Moreover, it is not only particulars that they say God does not know in the manner in which we know them but universals as well; for the universals known to us are also effects of the nature of existent being, while with His Knowledge the reverse is true. Thus the conclusion to which demonstration leads is that His Knowledge transcends qualification as "universal" or "particular." Consequently there is no point in disputing about this question, that is, whether to call them unbelievers or not.

On the question of the world, the ancient philosophers agree with the Ash'arites that it is originated and coeval with time. The Peripatetics only disagree with the Ash'arites and the Platonists in holding that past time is infinite. This difference is insufficient to justify a charge of unbelief.

[31] Concerning the question whether the world is pre-eternal or came into existence, the disagreement between the Ash'arite theologians and the ancient philosophers is in my view almost resolvable into a disagreement about naming, especially in the case of certain of the ancients. For they agree that there are three classes of beings: two extremes and one intermediate between the extremes. They agree also about naming the extremes; but they disagree about the intermediate class.

[32] [1] One extreme is a being that is brought into existence from something other than itself and by something, that is, by an efficient cause and from some matter; and it, that is, its existence, is preceded by time. This is the status of bodies whose generation is apprehended by sense, for example, the generation of water, air, earth, animals, plants, and so on. All alike, ancients and Ash'arites, agree in naming this class of beings "originated." [2] The opposite extreme to this is a being which is not made from or by anything and {is} not preceded by time; and there, too, all members of both schools agree in naming it "pre-eternal." This being is apprehended by demonstration; it is God, Blessed and Exalted, Who is the Maker, Giver of being and Sustainer of the universe; may He be praised and His Power exalted!

[33] [3] The class of being that is between these two extremes is that which is not made from anything and not preceded by time, but which is brought into existence by something, that is, by an agent. This is the world as a whole. Now they all agree on the presence of these three characters in the world. For the theologians admit that time does not precede it, or rather this is a necessary consequence for them, since time according to them is something that accompanies motion and bodies. They also agree with the ancients in the view that future time is infinite, and likewise future being. They only disagree about past time and past being: the theologians hold that it is finite (this is the doctrine of Plato and his followers), while Aristotle and his school hold that it is infinite, as is the case with future time.

[34] Thus, it is clear that [3] this last being bears a resemblance both to [1] the being that is really generated and to [2] the pre-eternal Being. So those who are more impressed with its resemblance to the pre-eternal than its resemblance to the originated name it "pre-eternal," while those who are more impressed with its resemblance to the originated name it "originated." But in truth it is neither really originated nor really pre-eternal, since the really originated is necessarily perishable and the really pre-eternal has no cause. Some—Plato and his followers—name it "originated and coeval with time," because time according to them is finite in the past.

1. That is, *The Epistle of Dedication (Risālat al-Ihdā')*; an English translation is available in Averroes, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, tr. Charles E. Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002).

[35] Thus, the doctrines about the world are not so very far apart from each other that some of them should be called irreligious and others not. For this to happen, opinions must be divergent in the extreme, that is, contraries such as the theologians suppose to exist on this question; that is, [they hold] that the names "pre-eternity" and "coming into existence" as applied to the world as a whole are contraries. But it is now clear from what we have said that this is not the case.

Anyhow, the apparent meaning of Scripture is that there was a being and time before God created the present being and time. Thus the theologians' interpretation is allegorical and does not command unanimous agreement.

[36] Over and above all this, these opinions about the world do not conform to the apparent meaning of Scripture. For if the apparent meaning of Scripture is searched, it will be evident from the verses that give us information about the bringing into existence of the world that its form really is originated, but that being itself and time extend continuously at both extremes, that is, without interruption. Thus, the words of God the Exalted (11:7), "He it is Who created the heavens and the Earth in six days, and His throne was on the water," taken in their apparent meaning imply that there was a being before this present being, namely, the throne and the water, and a time before this time, that is, the one that is joined to the form of this being before this present being, namely, the number of the movement of the celestial sphere. And the words of the Exalted (14:48), "On the day when the Earth shall be changed into other than Earth, and the heavens as well," also in their apparent meaning imply that there will be a second being after this being. And the words of the Exalted (41:11), "Then He directed Himself towards the sky, and it was smoke," in their apparent meaning imply that the heavens were created from something.

[37] Thus the theologians too in their statements about the world do not conform to the apparent meaning of Scripture but interpret it allegorically. For it is not stated in Scripture that God was existing with absolutely nothing else: a text to this effect is nowhere to be found. Then how is it conceivable that the theologians' allegorical interpretation of these verses could meet with unanimous agreement, when the apparent meaning of Scripture that we have mentioned about the existence of the world has been accepted by a school of philosophers!

On such difficult questions, error committed by a qualified judge of his subject is excused by God, while error by an unqualified person is not excused.

[38] It seems that those who disagree on the interpretation of these difficult questions earn merit if they are in the right and will be excused [by God] if they are in error. For assent to a thing as a result of an indication [of it] arising in the soul is something compulsory, not voluntary: that is, it is not for us [to choose] not to assent or to assent as it is to stand up or not to stand up. And since free choice is a condition of obligation, a man who assents to an error as a result of a consideration that has occurred to him is excused, if he is a scholar. This is why the Prophet, peace on him, said, "If the judge after exerting his mind makes a right decision, he will have a double reward; and if he makes a wrong decision, he will [still] have a single reward." And what judge is more important than he who makes judgments about being, that it is thus or not thus? These judges are the scholars, specially chosen by God for [the task of] allegorical interpretation, and this error that is forgivable according to the Law is only such error as proceeds from scholars when they study the difficult matters that the Law obliges them to study.

[39] But error proceeding from any other class of people is sheer sin, equally whether it relates to theoretical or to practical matters. For just as the judge who is ignorant of the [Prophet's] way of life is not excused if he makes an error in judgment, so he who makes judgments about beings without having the proper qualifications for [such] judgments is not excused but is either a sinner or an unbeliever. And if he who would judge what is allowed and forbidden is required to combine in himself the qualifications for exercise of personal judgment, namely, knowledge of the principles [of law] and knowledge of how to draw inferences from those principles by reasoning, how much more properly is he who would make judgments about beings required to be qualified, that is, to know the primary intellectual principle{s} and the way to draw inferences from them!

Texts of Scripture fall into three kinds with respect to the excusability of error. [1] Texts that must be taken in their apparent meaning by everyone. Since the meaning can be understood plainly by demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical methods alike, no one is excused for the error of interpreting these texts allegorically. [2] Texts that must be taken in their apparent meaning by the lower classes and interpreted allegorically by the demonstrative class. It is inexcusable for the lower classes to interpret them allegorically or for the demonstrative class to take them in their apparent meaning. [3] Texts whose classification under the previous headings is uncertain. Error in this matter by the demonstrative class is excused.

[40] In general, error about Scripture is of two types: Either error that is excused to one who is a qualified student of that matter in which the error occurs (as the skillful doctor is excused if he commits an error in the art of medicine and the skillful judge if he gives an erroneous judgment), but not excused to one who is not qualified in that subject; or error that is not excused to any person whatever, and that is unbelief if it concerns the principles of religion, or heresy if it concerns something subordinate to the principles.

[41] This [latter] error is that which occurs about [1] matters, knowledge of which is provided by all the different methods of indication, so that knowledge of the matter in question is in this way possible for everyone. Examples are acknowledgment of God, Blessed and Exalted; of the prophetic missions; and of happiness and misery in the next life; for these three principles are attainable by the three classes of indication, by which everyone without exception can come to assent to what he is obliged to know: I mean the rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative indications. So whoever denies such a thing, when it is one of the principles of the Law, is an unbeliever who persists in defiance with his tongue though not with his heart, or neglects to expose himself to learning the indication of its truth. For if he belongs to the demonstrative class of men, a way has been provided for him to assent to it, by demonstration; if he belongs to the dialectical class that is convinced by preaching, the way for him is by preaching. With this in view, the Prophet, peace on him, said, "I have been ordered to fight people until they say, 'There is no god but God,' and believe in me"; he means, by any of the three methods of attaining belief that suits them.

[42] [2] With regard to things that by reason of their recondite character are only knowable by demonstration, God has been gracious to those of His servants who have no access to demonstration, on account of their natures, habits, or lack of facilities for education: He has coined for them images and likenesses of these things, and summoned them to assent to those images, since it is possible for assent to those images to come about through the indications common to all men, that is, the dialectical and rhetorical indications. This is the reason why Scripture is divided into apparent and inner meanings: the apparent meaning consists of those images that are coined to stand for those ideas, while the inner meaning is those ideas [themselves], which are clear only to the demonstrative class. These are the four or five classes of beings mentioned by Abū Ḥāmid in *The Book of Distinction.*[2]

[43] [1] But when it happens, as we said, that we know the thing itself by the three methods, we do not need to coin images of it, and it remains true in its apparent meaning, not admitting allegorical interpretation. If an apparent text of this kind refers to principles, anyone who interprets it allegorically is an unbeliever, for example, anyone who thinks that there is no happiness or misery in the next life, and that the only purpose of this teaching is that men should be safeguarded from each other in their bodily and sensible lives, that it is but a practical device, and that man has no other goal than his sensible existence.

[44] If this is established, it will have become clear to you from what we have said that there are [1] apparent texts of Scripture that it is not permitted to interpret allegorically; to do so on fundamentals is unbelief, on subordinate matters, heresy. There are also [2] apparent texts that have to be interpreted allegorically by men of the demonstrative class; for such men to take them in their apparent meaning is unbelief, while for those who are not of the demonstrative class

2. The five classes would appear to be (1) the essential, (2) the sensible, (3) the imaginative, (4) the intellectual, and (5) simile; see Butterworth's note in his translation of the *Decisive Treatise*, p. 55, fn. 37.

to interpret them allegorically and take them out of their apparent meaning is unbelief or heresy on their part.

[45] Of this [latter] class are the verse about God's directing Himself and the Tradition about His descent. That is why the Prophet, peace on him, said in the case of the black woman, when she told him that God was in the sky, "Free her, for she is a believer." This was because she was not of the demonstrative class; and the reason for his decision was that the class of people to whom assent comes only through the imagination, that is, who do not assent to a thing except in so far as they can imagine it, find it difficult to assent to the existence of a being that is unrelated to any imaginable thing. This applies as well to those who understand from the relation stated merely [that God has] a place; these are people who have advanced a little in their thought beyond the position of the first class, [by rejecting] belief in corporeality. Thus, the [proper] answer to them with regard to such passages is that they belong to the ambiguous texts, and that the stop is to be placed after the words of God the Exalted (3:7), "And no one knows the interpretation thereof except God." The demonstrative class, while agreeing unanimously that this class of text must be interpreted allegorically, may disagree about the interpretation, according to the level of each one's knowledge of demonstration.

[46] There is also [3] a third class of Scriptural texts falling uncertainly between the other two classes, on which there is doubt. One group of those who devote themselves to theoretical study attach them to the apparent texts that it is not permitted to interpret allegorically, others attach them to the texts with inner meanings that scholars are not permitted to take in their apparent meanings. This [divergence of opinions] is due to the difficulty and ambiguity of this class of text. Anyone who commits an error about this class is excused, I mean any scholar.

The texts about the future life fall into [3], since demonstrative scholars do not agree whether to take them in their apparent meaning or interpret them allegorically. Either is permissible. But it is inexcusable to deny the fact of a future life altogether.

[47] If it is asked, "Since it is clear that scriptural texts in this respect fall into three grades, to which of these three grades, according to you, do the descriptions of the future life and its states belong?" we reply: The position clearly is that this matter belongs to the class [3] about which there is disagreement. For we find a group of those who claim an affinity with demonstration saying that it is obligatory to take these passages in their apparent meaning, because there is no demonstration leading to the impossibility of the apparent meaning in them—this is the view of the Ash'arites; while another group of those who devote themselves to demonstration interpret these passages allegorically, and these people give the most diverse interpretations of them. In this class must be counted Abū Ḥāmid and many of the Sūfīs; some of them combine the two interpretations of the passages, as Abū Ḥāmid does in some of his books.

[48] So it is likely that a scholar who commits an error in this matter is excused, while one who is correct receives thanks or a reward: that is, if he acknowledges the existence [of a future life] and merely gives a certain sort of allegorical interpretation, that is, of the mode of the future life, not of its existence. In this matter only the negation of existence is unbelief, because it concerns one of the principles of religion and one of those points to which assent is attainable through the three methods common to "the white man and the black man."

The unlearned classes must take such texts in their apparent meaning. It is unbelief for the learned to set down allegorical interpretations in popular writings. By doing this {al-}Ghazālī caused confusion among the people. Demonstrative books should be banned to the unqualified but not to the learned.

[49] But anyone who is not a man of learning is obliged to take these passages in their apparent meaning, and allegorical interpretation of them is for him unbelief because it *leads* to unbelief. That is why we hold that, for anyone whose duty it is to believe in the apparent meaning, allegorical interpretation is unbelief, because it leads to unbelief. Anyone of the interpretative class who discloses such [an interpretation] to him is summoning him to unbelief, and he who summons to unbelief is an unbeliever.

[50] Therefore, allegorical interpretations ought to be set down only in demonstrative books, because if they are in demonstrative books they are encountered

by no one but men of the demonstrative class. But if they are set down in other than demonstrative books and one deals with them by poetical, rhetorical, or dialectical methods, as Abū Ḥāmid does, then he commits an offense against the Law and against philosophy, even though the fellow intended nothing but good. For by this procedure he wanted to increase the number of learned men, but in fact he increased the number of the corrupted not of the learned! As a result, one group came to slander philosophy, another to slander religion, and another to reconcile the [first] two [groups]. It seems that this [last] was one of his objects in his books; an indication that he wanted by this [procedure] to arouse minds is that he adhered to no one doctrine in his books but was an Ashʿarite with the Ashʿarites, a Ṣūfī with the Ṣūfīs, and a philosopher with the philosophers, so that he was like the man in the verse:

> One day a Yamanī, if I meet a man of Yaman,
> And if I meet a Maʿaddī, I'm an ʿAdnānī.

[51] The *imāms* of the Muslims ought to forbid those of his books that contain learned matter to all save the learned, just as they ought to forbid demonstrative books to those who are not capable of understanding them. But the damage done to people by demonstrative books is lighter, because for the most part only persons of superior natural intelligence become acquainted with demonstrative books, and this class of persons is only misled through lack of practical virtue, unorganized reading, and tackling them without a teacher. On the other hand, their total prohibition obstructs the purpose to which the Law summons, because it is a wrong to the best class of people and the best class of beings. For to do justice to the best class of beings demands that they should be known profoundly, by persons equipped to know them profoundly, and these are the best class of people; and the greater the value of the being, the greater is the injury towards it, which consists of ignorance of it. Thus, the Exalted has said (31:13), "Associating [other gods] with God is indeed a great wrong."

We have only discussed these questions in a popular work because they were already being publicly discussed.

[52] This is as much as we see fit to affirm in this field of study, that is, the correspondence between religion and philosophy and the rules for allegorical interpretation in religion. If it were not for the publicity given to the matter and to these questions that we have discussed, we should not have permitted ourselves to write a word on the subject; and we should not have had to make excuses for doing so to the interpretative scholars, because the proper place to discuss these questions is in demonstrative books. God is the Guide and helps us to follow the right course!

## 3. Philosophical Interpretations of Scripture Should Not Be Taught to the Majority. The Law Provides Other Methods of Instructing Them

The purpose of Scripture is to teach true theoretical and practical science and right practice and attitudes.

[53] You ought to know that the purpose of Scripture is simply to teach true science and right practice. True science is knowledge of God, Blessed and Exalted, and the other beings as they really are, and especially of noble beings, and knowledge of happiness and misery in the next life. Right practice consists in performing the acts that bring happiness and avoiding the acts that bring misery; and it is knowledge of these acts that is called "practical science." They fall into two divisions: (1) outward bodily acts; the science of these is called "jurisprudence," and (2) acts of the soul, such as gratitude, patience, and other moral attitudes that the Law enjoins or forbids; the science of these is called "asceticism" or "the sciences of the future life." To these Abū Ḥāmid turned his attention in his book: as people had given up this sort [of act] and become immersed in the other sort, and as this sort [2] involves the greater fear of God, which is the cause of happiness, he called his book *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion.* But we have digressed from our subject, so let us return to it.

Scripture teaches concepts both directly and by symbols, and uses demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical arguments. Dialectical and rhetorical arguments are prevalent, because the main aim of Scripture is to teach the majority. In these arguments, concepts are indicated directly or by symbols, in various combinations in premises and conclusion{s}.

[54] We say: The purpose of Scripture is to teach true science and right practice; and teaching is of two classes, [of] concepts and [of] judgments, as the logicians have shown. Now the methods available to men of [arriving at] judgments are three: demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical; and the methods of forming concepts are two: either [conceiving] the object itself or [conceiving] a symbol of it. But not everyone has the natural ability to take in demonstrations, or [even] dialectical arguments, let alone demonstrative arguments that are so hard to learn and need so much time [even] for those who are qualified to learn them. Therefore, since it is the purpose of Scripture simply to teach everyone, Scripture has to contain every method of [bringing about] judgments of assent and every method of forming concepts.

[55] Now some of the methods of assent comprehend the majority of people, that is, the occurrence of assent as a result of them [is comprehensive]: these are the rhetorical and the dialectical [methods]—and the rhetorical is more comprehensive than the dialectical. Another method is peculiar to a smaller number of people: this is the demonstrative. Therefore, since the primary purpose of Scripture is to take care of the majority (without neglecting to arouse the elite), the prevailing methods of expression in religion are the common methods by which the majority comes to form concepts and judgments.

[56] These [common] methods in religion are of four classes:

[56.1] One of them occurs where the method is common yet specialized in two respects: that is, where it is certain in its concepts and judgments, in spite of being rhetorical or dialectical. These syllogisms are those whose premises, in spite of being based on accepted ideas or on opinions, are accidentally certain, and whose conclusions are accidentally to be taken in their direct meaning without symbolization. Scriptural texts of this class have no allegorical interpretations, and anyone who denies them or interprets them allegorically is an unbeliever.

[56.2] The second class occurs where the premises, in spite of being based on accepted ideas or on opinions, are certain, and where the conclusions are symbols for the things that it was intended to conclude. [Texts of] this [class], that is their conclusions, admit of allegorical interpretation.

[56.3] The third is the reverse of this: it occurs where the conclusions are the very things that it was intended to conclude, while the premises are based on accepted ideas or on opinions without being accidentally certain. [Texts of] this [class] also, that is, their conclusions, do not admit of allegorical interpretation, but their premises may do so.

[56.4] The fourth [class] occurs where the premises are based on accepted ideas or opinions, without being accidentally certain, and where the conclusions are symbols for what it was intended to conclude. In these cases the duty of the elite is to interpret them allegorically, while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning.

Where symbols are used, each class of men, demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical, must try to understand the inner meaning symbolized or rest content with the apparent meaning, according to their capacities.

[57] In general, everything in these [texts] that admits of allegorical interpretation can only be understood by demonstration. The duty of the elite here is to apply such interpretation; while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning in both respects, that is, in concept and judgment, since their natural capacity does not allow more than that.

[58] But there may occur to students of Scripture allegorical interpretations due to the superiority of one of the common methods over another in [bringing about] assent, that is, when the indication contained in the allegorical interpretation is more persuasive than the indication contained in the apparent meaning. Such interpretations are popular; and [the making of them] is possibly a duty, for those powers of theoretical understanding have attained the dialectical level. To this sort belong some of the interpretations of the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites—though the Mu'tazilites are generally sounder in their statements. The masses, on the other hand, who are incapable of

more than rhetorical arguments, have the duty of taking these [texts] in their apparent meaning, and they are not permitted to know such interpretations at all.

[59] Thus, people in relation to Scripture fall into three classes:

> [59.1] One class is these who are not people of interpretation at all: these are the rhetorical class. They are the overwhelming mass, for no man of sound intellect is exempted from this kind of assent.
> [59.2] Another class is the people of dialectical interpretation: these are the dialecticians, either by nature alone or by nature and habit.
> [59.3] Another class is the people of certain interpretation: these are the demonstrative class, by nature and training, that is, in the art of philosophy. This interpretation ought not to be expressed to the dialectical class, let alone to the masses.

To explain the inner meaning to people unable to understand it is to destroy their belief in the apparent meaning without putting anything in its place. The result is unbelief in learners and teachers. It is best for the learned to profess ignorance, quoting the Qur'ān on the limitation of man's understanding.

[60] When something of these allegorical interpretations is expressed to anyone unfit to receive them—especially demonstrative interpretations, because of their remoteness from common knowledge—both he who expresses it and he to whom it is expressed are led into unbelief. The reason for that [in the case of the latter] is that allegorical interpretation comprises two things, rejection of the apparent meaning and affirmation of the allegorical one; so that if the apparent meaning is rejected in the mind of someone who can only grasp apparent meanings, without the allegorical meaning being affirmed in his mind, the result is unbelief, if it [the text in question] concerns the principles of religion.

[61] Allegorical interpretations, then, ought not to be expressed to the masses nor set down in rhetorical or dialectical books, that is, books containing arguments of these two sorts, as was done by Abū Ḥāmid. They should [not] be expressed to this class; and with regard to an apparent text, when there is a [self-evident] doubt whether it is apparent to everyone and whether knowledge of its interpretation is impossible for them, they should be told that it is ambiguous and [its meaning] known by no one except God; and that the stop should be put here in the sentence of the Exalted (3:7), "And no one knows the interpretation thereof except God." The same kind of answer should also be given to a question about abstruse matters, which there is no way for the masses to understand; just as the Exalted has answered in His saying (17:85), "And they will ask you about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is by the command of my Lord; you have been given only a little knowledge.'"

Certain people have injured the masses particularly, by giving them allegorical interpretations that are false. These people are exactly analogous to bad medical advisers. The true doctor is related to bodily health in the same way as the Legislator to spiritual health, which the Qur'ān teaches us to pursue. The true allegory is "the deposit" mentioned in the Qur'ān.

[62] As for the man who expresses these allegories to unqualified persons, he is an unbeliever on account of his summoning people to unbelief. This is contrary to the summons of the Legislator, especially when they are false allegories concerning the principles of religion, as has happened in the case of a group of people of our time. For we have seen some of them thinking that they were being philosophic and that they perceived, with their remarkable wisdom, things that conflict with Scripture in every respect, that is [in passages] that do not admit of allegorical interpretation; and that it was obligatory to express these things to the masses. But by expressing those false beliefs to the masses, they have been a cause of perdition to the masses and themselves, in this world and the next.

[63] The relation between the aim of these people and the aim of the Legislator [can be illustrated by] a parable of a man who goes to a skillful doctor. [This doctor's] aim is to preserve the health and cure the diseases of all the people by prescribing for them rules that can be commonly accepted about the necessity of using the things that will preserve their health and cure their diseases and avoiding the opposite things. He is unable to make them all doctors, because a doctor is one who knows by demonstrative methods the

things that preserve health and cure disease. Now this [man whom we have mentioned] goes out to the people and tells them, "These methods prescribed by this doctor for you are not right"; and he sets out to discredit them, so that they are rejected by the people. Or he says, "They have allegorical interpretations"; but the people neither understand these nor assent to them in practice. Well, do you think that people in this condition will do any of the things that are useful for preserving health and curing disease, or that this man who has persuaded them to reject what they formerly believed in will now be able to use those [things] with them, I mean for preserving health? No, he will be unable to use those [things] with them, nor will they use them, and so they will all perish.

[64] This [is what will happen] if he expresses to them true allegories about those matters, because of their inability to understand them; let alone if he expresses to them false allegories, because this will lead them to think that there are no such things as health that ought to be preserved and disease that ought to be cured—let alone that there are things that preserve health and cure disease. It is the same when someone expresses allegories to the masses, and to those who are not qualified to understand them, in the sphere of Scripture; thus he makes it appear false and turns people away from it, and he who turns people away from Scripture is an unbeliever.

[65] Indeed this comparison is certain, not poetic, as one might suppose. It presents a true analogy, in that the relation of the doctor to the health of bodies is [the same as] the relation of the Legislator to the health of souls; that is, the doctor is he who seeks to preserve the health of bodies when it exists and to restore it when it is lost, while the Legislator is he who desires this [end] for the health of souls. This health is what is called "fear of God." The precious Book has told us to seek it by acts conformable to the Law, in several verses. Thus, the Exalted has said (2:183), "Fasting has been prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those who were before you; perhaps you will fear God." Again the Exalted has said (22:37), "Their flesh and their blood shall not touch God, but your fear shall touch him"; (29:45), "Prayer prevents immorality and transgression"; and other verses to the same effect contained in the precious Book. Through knowledge of Scripture and practice according to Scripture the Legislator aims solely at this health; and it is from this health that happiness in the future life follows, just as misery in the future life follows from its opposite.

[66] From this it will be clear to you that true allegories ought not to be set down in popular books, let alone false ones. The true allegory is the deposit that man was charged to hold and that he held, and from which all beings shied away, that is, that which is mentioned in the words of the Exalted (33:72), "We offered the deposit to the heavens, the Earth and the mountains," [and so on to the end of] the verse.

It was due to the wrong use of allegorical interpretation by the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites that hostile sects arose in Islam.

[67] It was due to allegorical interpretations—especially the false ones—and the supposition that such interpretations of Scripture ought to be expressed to everyone, that the sects of Islam arose, with the result that each one accused the others of unbelief or heresy. Thus the Mu'tazilites interpreted many verses and Traditions allegorically, and expressed their interpretations to the masses, and the Ash'arites did the same, although they used such interpretations less frequently. In consequence they threw people into hatred, mutual detestation, and wars; tore the Scriptures to shreds; and completely divided people.

[68] In addition to all this, in the methods that they followed to establish their interpretations, they neither went along with the masses nor with the elite: not with the masses, because their methods were [more] obscure than the methods common to the majority, and not with the elite, because if these methods are inspected they are found deficient in the conditions [required] for demonstrations, as will be understood after the slightest inspection by anyone acquainted with the conditions of demonstration. Further, many of the principles on which the Ash'arites based their knowledge are sophistical, for they deny many necessary truths, such as the permanence of accidents, the action of things on other things, and the existence of necessary causes for effects, of substantial forms, and of secondary causes.

[69] And their theorists wronged the Muslims in this sense, that a sect of Ash'arites called an unbeliever anyone who did not attain knowledge of the existence

of the Glorious Creator by the methods laid down by them in their books for attaining this knowledge. But in truth it is they who are the unbelievers and in error! From this point they proceeded to disagree, one group saying, "The primary obligation is theoretical study," another group saying, "It is belief"; that is, [this happened] because they did not know which are the methods common to everyone, through whose doors the Law has summoned all people [to enter]; they supposed that there was only one method. Thus they mistook the aim of the Legislator and were both themselves in error and led others into error.

The proper methods for teaching the people are indicated in the Qur'ān, as the early Muslims knew. The popular portions of the Book are miraculous in providing for the needs of every class of mind. We intend to make a study of its teachings at the apparent level and thus help to remedy the grievous harm done by ignorant partisans of philosophy and religion.

[70] It may be asked: "If these methods followed by the Ash'arites and other theorists are not the common methods by which the Legislator has aimed to teach the masses, and by which alone it is possible to teach them, then what are those [common] methods in this religion of ours?" We reply: They are exclusively the methods set down in the precious Book. For if the precious Book is inspected, there will be found in it the three methods that are available for all the people, [namely], the common methods for the instruction of the majority of the people and the special method. And if their merits are inspected, it becomes apparent that no better common methods for the instruction of the masses can be found than the methods mentioned in it.

[71] Thus, whoever tampers with them, by making an allegorical interpretation not apparent in itself, or [at least] not more apparent to everyone than they are (and that [greater apparency] is something nonexistent), is rejecting their wisdom and rejecting their intended effects in procuring human happiness. This is very apparent from [a comparison of] the condition of the first believers with the condition of those who came after them. For the first believers arrived at perfect virtue and fear of God only by using these sayings [of Scripture] without interpreting them allegorically; and anyone of them who did find out an allegorical interpretation did not think fit to express it [to others]. But when those who came after them used allegorical interpretation, their fear of God grew less, their dissensions increased, their love for one another was removed, and they became divided into sects.

[72] So whoever wishes to remove this heresy from religion should direct his attention to the precious Book, and glean from it the indications present [in it] concerning everything in turn that it obliges us to believe, and exercise his judgment in looking at its apparent meaning as well as he is able, without interpreting any of it allegorically except where the allegorical meaning is apparent in itself, that is, commonly apparent to everyone. For if the sayings set down in Scripture for the instruction of the people are inspected, it seems that in mastering their meaning one arrives at a point beyond which none but a man of the demonstrative class can extract from their apparent wording a meaning that is not apparent in them. This property is not found in any other sayings.

[73] For those religious sayings in the precious Book that are expressed to everyone have three properties that indicate their miraculous character: (1) There exist none more completely persuasive and convincing to everyone than they. (2) Their meaning admits naturally of mastery, up to a point beyond which their allegorical interpretation (when they are of a kind to have such an interpretation) can only be found out by the demonstrative class. (3) They contain means of drawing the attention of the people of truth to the true allegorical meaning. This [character] is not found in the doctrines of the Ash'arites nor in those of the Mu'tazilites, that is, their interpretations do not admit of mastery nor contain [means of] drawing attention to the truth, nor are they true; and this is why heresies have multiplied.

[74] It is our desire to devote our time to this object and achieve it effectively, and if God grants us a respite of life we shall work steadily towards it in so far as this is made possible for us; and it may be that that work will serve as a starting point for our successors. For our soul is in the utmost sorrow and pain by reason of the evil fancies and perverted beliefs that have infiltrated this religion, and particularly such [afflictions] as have happened to it at the hands of people who claim an affinity with philosophy. For injuries from a friend are

more severe than injuries from an enemy. I refer to the fact that philosophy is the friend and milk-sister of religion; thus injuries from people related to philosophy are the severest injuries [to religion]—apart from the enmity, hatred, and quarrels that such [injuries] stir up between the two, which are companions by nature and lovers by essence and instinct. It has also been injured by a host of ignorant friends who claim an affinity with it: these are the sects that exist within it. But God directs all men aright and helps everyone to love Him; He unites their hearts in the fear of Him, and removes from them hatred and loathing by His grace and His mercy!

[75] Indeed, God has already removed many of these ills, ignorant ideas, and misleading practices by means of this triumphant rule. By it He has opened a way to many benefits, especially to the class of persons who have trodden the path of study and sought to know the truth. This [He has done] by summoning the masses to a middle way of knowing God the Glorious, [a way] that is raised above the low level of the followers of authority but is below the turbulence of the theologians; and by drawing the attention of the elite to their obligation to make a thorough study of the principles of religion. God is the Giver of success and the Guide by His Goodness.